The Choice and Control tool identifies the **seven** choices you have in any communication situation. It reminds you to focus on producing positive outcomes by taking responsibility for your perceptions and behaviors. The tool is based on the following concepts:

- Perceptions are based on our experience.

- We develop a set of beliefs based on that experience which, in turn, influence our thoughts or perceptions in any situation.

- Thoughts then influence feelings.

- Feelings influence our behaviors and actions.

- Actions influence outcomes.

- Outcomes generally support beliefs.

- Negative perceptions and behaviors produce negative outcomes.

- Positive perceptions and behaviors produce positive outcomes.

Example

During the passenger loading of an airplane flight, someone bumps into you. Your negative perception is *"people should be more careful!"* You react angrily: *"Watch your step!"* You look up and notice the person is on crutches and is having a difficult time. You immediately change your perception to one of empathy. You change your behavior and offer to help the person.

The Seven Choices

1. **Leave the situation/person.**

Both in professional and personal life, it is sometimes very important to make the choice to leave a situation or person. A job situation might be causing you a great deal of stress, and you no longer believe you can make the situation better. It may be time to leave! Similarly, a relationship that you experience as seriously unhealthy and unhappy may be necessary to end. Think of the people you know who stay in highly negative work or personal situations. Some may not *believe* they have options that they could actually leave and thrive again elsewhere.

2. **Live with the situation or person.**

We all know this choice. The situation or relationship may have its downside, but we still believe it is best to stick with the situation or person. The job, for example, may offer financial or other benefits that we highly value, or the relationship gives us something that we need so we are willing to live with the downside. *The problem arises when we don't perceive we have any other options,* and *must* live with the situation or person.

3. **Change the situation/person.**

This third choice may sound familiar. Have you ever tried to change the behavior of another person? A friend, mate, or colleague? How successful were you? We are sure that through painful experience you have concluded that people don't change unless they, themselves, are motivated to do so.
Unlike people, situations can be changed, but it often requires that you first change your own perceptions and behaviors. Which leads us to the fourth choice.

4. **Change your perception of the situation/person.**

The fourth choice gives you the most control. You have the control to change your perceptions, how you are thinking about the situation or the person. For example, in a job that feels too stressed, you may choose to change your perception and believe that you can re-design the job to significantly reduce your feelings of stress. In a negative relationship at work, you may change your perception when you notice that the person you are having difficulty with may be preoccupied with personal problems. You may decide to listen more carefully to his or her concerns and find that by understanding these concerns you can depersonalize the negative behavior.

Changing your perceptions means *being aware of how you think* about something. It means asking yourself *"is the way I'm thinking really useful or is it limiting?"* Your perceptions are based on your current beliefs and they are either useful or they are not. When you encounter an obstacle, ask yourself, *"how many other ways could I perceive this problem?"*

5. **Change your behaviors with the situation/person.**

Behavioral change, like perceptual change, can be difficult; it can also be relatively easy if made in small steps. You could work at home one day a week (behavioral change) to reduce on the job stress. When a colleague confronts you in a way that usually produces a defensive reaction, you could decide to change your behavior. Instead of "hooking in" and being defensive, you may choose to listen openly and question for the underlying issues that the person seems to be experiencing.

6. **Change both your perception and behaviors.**

Changing both your perceptions and behaviors is extremely powerful. Again, these changes are within your control, not dependent on others, so you always can make this choice. In this case, you are altering the way you perceive a situation or person and are reflecting that change in your behaviors.

7. **Pretend you've changed.**

The seventh choice is a personal favorite. Countless times, in many different situations and with many kinds of people, we have had to first "pretend" to change our perceptions and behaviors. For example, we forced ourselves to imagine less stressful work lives even though we were actually perceiving we had no choice but to continue, using choice #4 (change your perception). We pretended it was possible and brainstormed some other options. It worked!

Or we changed our behaviors with people that caused us difficulty. We may have talked more, or less, but somehow we experimented with different behaviors until there was a breakthrough in the quality of the relationship.

Don't underestimate #7. It may be called "fake it 'till you make it" but the yield is very great.

Guidelines

Examine the choices you have in any situation or with any person. Determine where you have control. Choose and practice useful perceptions and behaviors to produce positive outcomes.

In any situation or in relationship with any person, there are only seven choices for dealing with obstacles. All choices are viable in any given situation or with any person. Choices 4, 5, 6, and 7 are always within the individual's immediate control and have the greatest potential for positive outcomes. A person who examines and is capable of changing his/her own perceptions and behaviors has the greatest range and flexibility of action. If all people in an organization are capable of such change, the organization has the greatest range and flexibility of action.